

Apprentice Saints!

Isaiah 25⁶⁻⁹; Psalm 24¹⁻⁶; Revelation 21^{1-6a}; John 11³²⁻⁴⁴

*See I am making all things new.
[Revelation 21⁵]*

I think the best definition I have heard of an 'expert' is,
an ordinary person a long way from home!

You could be forgiven for thinking that a similar definition of saint is,
an extraordinary person a long way from reality!

Yet, we are all saints - all Christians are saint (even if we are only apprentice saints). It is in our DNA from our baptism and from our first conscious decision accept Christ's call to follow him, to receive his gift of forgiveness and then to live as Christians. Despite appearances that is what we are - we are God's holy ones!

Despite the focus on death in the readings today - you don't have to be dead to be a saint!

- ✦ It may not be too fashionable in modern sermons to talk too much about what happens after death, but there is a lot that is positive here and we shouldn't shy away from.
- ✦ Isaiah and Revelation anticipate a life beyond this life without death and without tears.
- ✦ Isaiah and Revelation anticipate a life lived consciously in God's presence - Isaiah encourages us to party and Revelation says that the Church is an eager bride for her groom (the Greek word used here is *numphe*, from which we get the English word *nymphomaniac*, such is the desire for God!).
- ✦ It even appears as if we will have a choice of what we are going to have to drink in heaven! Revelation says we can have water, but Isaiah says that we can have wine (Isaiah 24:9 tells us that wine is removed as a sign of God's judgement but we can have it again as a sign of God's delight in his people).

This doesn't seem too bad at all!

The thing that hit me between the eyes when I was thinking about the readings for this morning was the fact that, in the vision of the perfect New Jerusalem in Revelation, there

is no Temple! Therein lies the secret of sainthood: people become saints through their direct relationship with God. The Church is the bride of Christ in relationship with God.

- ✦ The Gospel gives us a rare insight into an emotional Jesus. The words used reveal that it isn't simply emotionalism, but a deep disturbance at what was happening around him. All the wailing wasn't what he considered the right response to death - it didn't show a faith in God when the worst happens. Mary and her sister Martha make no pretence - they are annoyed that Jesus let their brother die and told him so.
 - ✦ The strength of the relationship between Mary, Martha and Jesus allowed them to be honest.
 - ✦ The greatest saints have never been the yes-men in the Church - they push the boundaries!
- ✦ Interestingly, Jesus doesn't need an exhumation order to raise a body and does not need a faculty from the Diocese to move a stone from a grave - Mary and Martha are hesitant because they were anxious about the state of the body, but they co-operate and the stone is removed from the cave.
 - ✦ The strength of the relationship allowed them all to trust each other when what was happening wasn't comfortable.
 - ✦ The greatest saints have never played things 'safe'.
- ✦ What Jesus is looking for in the Gospel story is that people **see the glory of God**. Theologically, all the readings today are exciting - they indicate that the curse of death from Genesis 3 now has no power!
 - ✦ The strength of the relationship between God and his people is that we allow God to transform things for the better.
 - ✦ The greatest saints have always understood this - which is why so many have faced martyrdom cheerfully and full of faith and hope.

We aren't saints because we are holier than anyone else, we aren't saints because we get everything right.

We are saints because we trust God enough for him to make a difference to our lives - that's all it takes.